

## Henderson View

From the Ground Up - January 05, 2007

By BEN STEPHENS VIEW STAFF WRITER

Henderson Mayor Jim Gibson is convinced that the soil at a former chemical dumping ground in east Henderson will be safe once an effort to clean up the site for a future master-planned community wraps up in a couple of years. "(It) will be cleaned to the standard that a 2-year-old can eat it," he said of the soil early last month at the dedication of a public information center detailing the project.

By the middle of this year, Basic Remediation Co., a subsidiary of Basic Management Inc., could begin excavating as much as 2 million cubic yards of soil from the 2,200-acre site east of Boulder Highway, north of Lake Mead Parkway and south of the Las Vegas Wash.

About 400 acres served as unlined percolation and evaporation ponds from the early 1940s until 1976. Effluent water full of chemicals was pumped there from the U.S. Defense Department-built Basic Magnesium plant that manufactured materials during World War II.

Among the contaminants in the effluent were metals, radionuclides, pesticides, salts and asbestos, according to a company fact sheet.

Ranajit Sahu, director of environmental services for Basic Remediation Co., said there are two types of chemicals in the soil: naturally occurring and man-made.

Sahu said about half of the naturally occurring chemicals, such as arsenic, are "present in the soil in general" across the valley. However, they are found in much higher, dangerous concentrations on this site.

Sahu said that among the man-made chemicals is the pesticide DDT. Industrial waste mixed with wastewater was pumped into the ponds, he said. The water itself evaporated, leaving behind sediment that now sits atop uncontaminated earth. In some areas, materials leached deeper into the soil than others.

In 1976, the use of unlined ponds ceased, the company said. That same year, Titanium Metals Corp., which operates on the easternmost section of the BMI complex, established lined ponds on the dumping site until becoming self-contained in 2005.

Since the 1990s, BMI and the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection have been identifying the contaminants on the site and their locations. To date, more than 250,000 soil and groundwater tests have been conducted, the company said.

Although the initial tests looked for more than 400 chemicals that could have

been in the soil, Sahu said no more than 60 actually are present on the site. About half of those chemicals found are naturally occurring.

"We have taken a prudent approach of looking for a lot more things in the event that we may find them," said Mark Paris, president and CEO of Basic Management Inc. and The LandWell Co., BMI's real estate development subsidiary.

Brian Rakvicka, a supervisor in NDEP's special projects branch of corrective actions, said the process for cleaning up the site will be to excavate the ground at different depths, removing the contaminated soil. Following the first round of excavation, samples will be taken, possibly followed by more excavation – with the cycle continuing until the site is deemed safe for development, he said.

"If somewhere we find a spot, we'll go back and excavate again," Paris said. The depths of the excavation vary depending on the location, Rakvicka said. "Some areas may require none, some may require 20 feet," he said. The soil does not have to be totally free of the chemicals, but it must meet acceptable standards set by NDEP, which uses guidelines set forth by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Basically, there's some risk levels promulgated by the EPA," Rakvicka said. "But there's no such thing as zero."

The project's work plans and methodology still must be approved by NDEP before moving forward, but Sahu said it could start in mid-2007.

Basic Management Inc. will build a 70-acre permanent landfill at its industrial complex off Lake Mead Parkway, where the excavated soil will be stored, Sahu said. While the company does not expect to excavate more than 2 million cubic yards, the landfill will be constructed with enough capacity to hold 3.5 million. Paris said the landfill will have an impermeable plastic lining at the bottom of it and the waste will be covered by another liner on top.

"It's almost like putting it in a giant Ziplock bag," he said. Paris said there are no plans to import backfill to level out the site once excavation is finished.

The LandWell Co. has a purchase agreement with Centex Homes, which will buy the property in phases as NDEP deems it safe for development, Paris said. Although LandWell is not obligated to test any further once the state releases the property, Sahu said the company plans to go "the extra 10 miles." "Once the homebuilder grades the lot, and before he starts construction, we will come back and test it again," Paris said, adding that the company will do this on the entire site, not just the area that was excavated.

"The reason for that is peace of mind ... not thorough in an abstract sense, but thorough as it pertains to that lot," Sahu said. "We don't want people to take us on faith."

Paris estimated that LandWell already has invested \$60 million in this effort,

and said the company easily could spend another \$30 million. He declined to disclose how much Centex Homes has agreed to pay for the land, but asked whether the project would break even in the end, he said, "I think so." "Maybe five to 10 years ago, no. It would be upside down," he said. "But because of the depletion of land in the valley, and land values have continued to go up, we'll be in the black."

The company held the grand opening of its public information center, located just inside the entrance of the Tuscany master-planned community, last month. The center has 19 panels that provide an overview of the site's past, present and future.

A restoration advisory committee was established to gather input from the public and address its concerns. Its meetings are open to anyone, and the next one is scheduled for 3 p.m. Jan. 18 at the Henderson Convention Center. Gibson said he has been questioned in the past about the site being a "boondoggle," but he called it one of the most important pieces of real estate in the valley. He commended BMI's commitment to cleaning up the site. Paris said that in addition to cleaning the site, developing it is good stewardship of the valley's real estate because it is an in-fill parcel — as opposed to building farther into the suburban areas.

With new home sales slated to begin in fall 2008, as many as 30,000 residents are expected to live in the community when it's all said and done, according to promotional material released by LandWell. The residential development will be centered around an urban core, with about 520 acres set aside for open space and trails, and 48 acres set aside for three elementary schools and a middle school, according to company materials.

BMI, a privately owned holding company, was created by a consortium of private chemical manufacturers in 1952 to manage the industrial complex after acquiring it from the Colorado River Commission. The federal government sold the complex to the state commission in 1948 when the war ended. A document repository detailing the effort is available at the James I. Gibson Library, 280 S. Water St.

LandWell's Web site, [www.landwellco.com](http://www.landwellco.com), also features a repository